Sohum Mantra

The Soham mantra has been called the universal mantra because of the fact that its vibration is already a part of the breath, and everybody breathes. *Sooooo...* is the sound of inhalation, and *Hummmm...* is the sound of exhalation.

- *Sooooo...* is the sound of inhalation, and is remembered in the mind along with that inhalation.

- *Hummmm...* is the sound of exhalation, and is remembered in the mind along with that exhalation.

The Q&A of Sohum: Sohum mantra is also designated as Hamsa, Hansa, Soham, So Ham, or So Hum.

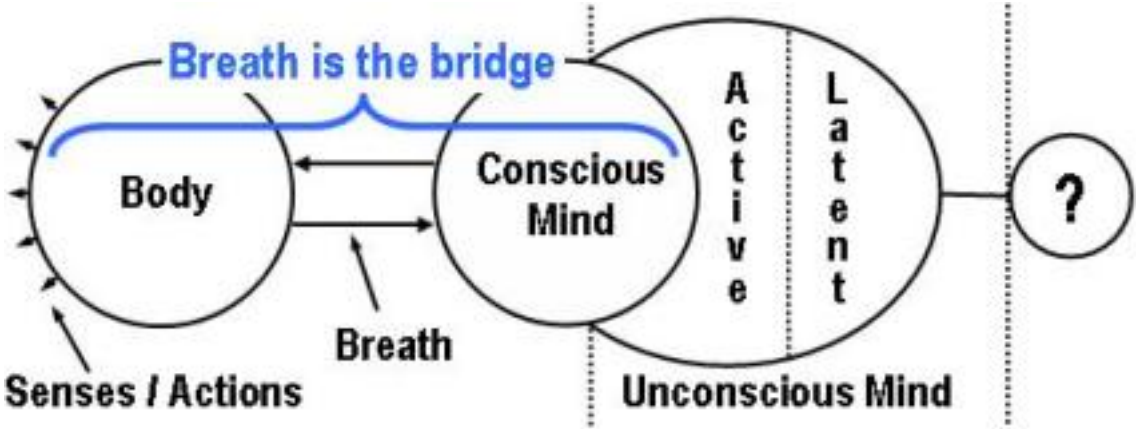
- Hamsa (or hansa) poses the question, *Who am I*?

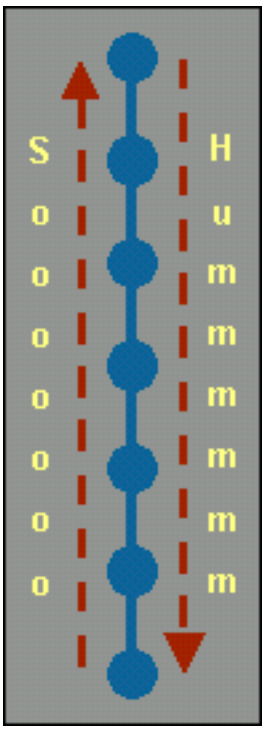
- Soham provides the answer, *I am that*.

I am That: While the English translation may not be as important as the quality of the sound vibration, Soham translates as *I am that*. When remembered repeatedly, it declares *I am that I am that I am that I am.* Remembering the Soham mantra often during the day can be a very useful practice.

Soham and diaphragm breathing: The Soham mantra is extremely useful when practiced along with diaphragmatic breathing. Allow your attention to rest in a space about the size of the palm of your hand, just below the breast bone, at the upper abdomen. As you exhale with Hummmmmm, be aware of how that space gently pushes in, so as to exhale completely. As you inhale with Soooooooo, be aware of how that space move moves back outward, and how the lower ribs flare slightly outwards, to the sides. Allow the breath to be smooth, with no jerkiness. Allow it to be comfortably slow, and have no pauses between the breaths. Exhalation gently rounds back into inhalation, and inhalation gently rounds back into exhalation. This may be done either in a seated meditation posture or lying on your back in the corpse posture.

The finest bridge between body and mind: Breath is a bridge between the body and the mind. When trying to meditate it is extremely common to have tension in the muscles and noisy thoughts in the mind. The nervous system is the arbiter between the tense body and the noisy mind. One of the best ways to regulate that nervous system, and in turn the body and mind, is through the breath. This has been known by the Yogis for thousands of years, and has also come to be widely known in recent years by the modern medical and psychological community.





Soham in breath along the spine: One of the deeper ways to use the Soham mantra is through spinal breath, by coordinating body, breath, and mind (Such practice has been popularized as a part of kriya yoga or kundalini yoga, though it is universal practice). As you inhale, allow the mind to be aware of the vibration Soooooo as your attention moves upward along the subtle cord of the spine (sushumna), through the chakras towards the crown of the head.

As you exhale, allow the mind to be aware of the vibration Hummmmmm as your attention moves downward along the subtle spine towards the perineum at the base of the spine, at the flat place between the genital area and the anus. Be aware of a thin, steady stream of energy and consciousness flowing up and down between this area near the base of the spine and the crown of the head. You may or may not be literally aware of the stream, and you may or may not experience it as a milky white stream of light. However you experience this flow is okay, and you will find it is a very beneficial meditation practice.

Soham at the nostrils: Meditation with Soham at the bridge of the nostrils is a very effective practice that stabilizes and purifies the mind, training the mind in one-pointedness. Meditation on the gross breath leads to awareness of the subtler energy of prana, and then to deeper meditation beyond. Focus attention on the feel of the breath, the cognitive sense of touch, as it flows in and out, remembering the vibrations Soooooooo and Hummmmmm. Gradually allow the exhalation to elongate, becoming twice as long as the inhalation.

Listening and remembering versus speaking: The vibrations of the Soham mantra are allowed to arise in the mind field and to repeat themselves. While you might initially be using your will power to remember the mantra, it gradually will be noticed more automatically, somewhat like a song or an advertising slogan might start to repeat in your mind. Though you may not be literally hearing an audible sound of the mantra, the stance of attention is more like listening or remembering than it is one of speaking the mantra.

Japa and ajapa japa: Recitation of a mantra is called japa. When that remembering comes automatically, it is called ajapa japa, meaning that the repetition called japa is coming without effort. A still subtler meaning of ajapa japa is having a constant awareness of the felt or experiential meaning of the mantra. In the case of Soham mantra, it means a constant, pervasive awareness of the flow of subtle energy related to the mantra and the exhalation and inhalation. At that point, the gross level of the syllables of the mantra may or may not still be there.

Songs within: There are many songs being played within, but they are seldom noticed. The heart sings a song that resonates throughout the body. The brain plays steady notes that can be heard when we are still. The breath sings a song, so-hum, so-hum; over and over, it sings the song of the Soham mantra. We are so busy, so entangled in the external world that we never take the time to listen within, to hear the natural melodies that will guide us still further inward to the finer music of consciousness. This is not mere poetic reflection; it is the truth. The inner vibrations of Soham mantra can be felt, heard, and experienced at ever subtler levels. The vibrations themselves are the guides.

Swarodaya: The science of breath is called swarodaya in Sanskrit. The meaning ofswara is a ripple of sound, and the meaning of swarodaya is the ocean. Thus, the science of breath is the science of the waves of sound in the ocean of consciousness. That sound, so-hum, so-hum, ever repeats itself, declaring, I am that, I am that, I am that, like the waves ever flowing in the ocean of bliss.

The word leads back to the sound: Sound creates a wave form, the wave form creates a word, and the word has an external meaning. By starting with the external meaning of the Soham mantra, the breath, we follow the word, so-hum, back through the wave form from which it came, and to the sound from which that wave sprung forth.

Use the sound, not the word: For meditation, one might begin by using the word and reflecting on it's grosser meaning. One might think of so-hum as the literal sound that can be heard by listening to the passage of air at the nostrils. However, the deeper, truer practice for the student of meditation is to seek the subtler level of the Soham mantra, and go into the sound itself, allowing it to become the guide, leading attention further inward. Words surely have their place in relation to the external world, but the sound vibration itself is a finer, more powerful guide within.

Finding the silent sound: All of these sounds, one after the other, lead us inward to the still, silent sound out of which they all emerge. The process comes in stages. At first, the mantra has a gross vibration and meaning. Next, there is the feeling associated with the mantra, which is itself a subtler version of the mantra. Then, there is a constant presence or awareness of the mantra. Finally, there is the soundless sound, the essence of the mantra. If anyone wants to know the meaning of silent sound of the Soham mantra, there is only one way to do so, and that is to follow the sounds inward to that place. Inside, the meaning is revealed in direct experience.

Attention is required: There is one skill that is of utmost importance to meditation, and that is training the attention. It means developing a steady, unbroken relationship with the so-hum of the breath, regardless of the other activities of the mind. It is not about repressing thoughts, but is more like listening intently to the whisper of a beloved friend in a crowded room. It is your conviction to attention that makes the voice clear, not the elimination of the other people. So too, the thoughts of the mind are allowed their life, as you listen passionately to the so-hum, so-hum of the breath ebbing and flowing through the gross and subtle bodies, and the mind.